



Office of Refugee Resettlement Refugee Program Education and English Language Promising Practice



Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Miami URM Education Specialist

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Miami (CCADM) has an Educational Specialist dedicated to helping unaccompanied refugee minor (URM) youth successfully pursue secondary and post-secondary education and employment. CCADM found that URM youth face unique challenges that prevent them from obtaining a high school diploma or engaging in post-secondary education and training opportunities. This position collaborates with social workers to meet youth's individual needs and serves as the URM youth liaison for adult education schools and colleges.



Practice Description

CCADM employs an Education Specialist who provides critical support to older URM youth interested in extended foster care services.¹ The Education Specialist collaborates with youth and their social workers to develop customized educational plans to guide youth in the steps necessary to successfully complete high school and go on to college or obtain employment. The Education Specialist tailors each education plan to address individual barriers by coordinating student learning supports and community resources that tend to be fragmented. Further, this position connects youth to employment and conducts job readiness and financial literacy trainings.

URM youth receive ongoing individualized assistance to help them navigate the college application process, apply for financial aid, or explore vocational and career training programs. As the primary point of contact for CCADM's partner organizations, the Education Specialist shares important insights about the unique challenges that URM youth face, facilitates cross-cultural understanding between URM youth and their schools, and advocates on their behalf when necessary.

¹ In 2013, Florida passed a law allowing youth who would normally age-out of licensed care at age 18 to opt to stay in until age 21 (or 22 with a documented disability) while finishing school or gaining work skills and experience.



Need for the Practice

State requirements changed, allowing youth to remain in foster care after turning 18 years old if they were enrolled in high school, adult education, college, vocational education, or an employment training program, or if they were employed at least 80 hours a month. CCADM staff observed that URM youth who wished to extend foster care tended to face several challenges that prevented them from meeting the state's education and employment requirements. For example, staff identified that youth often had limited educational backgrounds and English language literacy, lacked knowledge about how to navigate U.S. educational systems, and did not have the skills to access meaningful employment.



How to Implement the Practice

CCADM described the following key steps to implement this practice:

- Include youth and their social workers when developing an educational plan. Involving the youth in this process helps the agency to provide individualized services and set realistic goals that can lead to academic and employment success.
- Have systems in place to regularly monitor youth progress. This includes having access to student data and communicating with school and employment staff who have direct knowledge of and interaction with URM youth. CCADM's Education Specialist worked with schools to obtain permission to access student records to review URM youth's progress and identify areas where additional assistance may be required.
- Provide life skills instruction on a monthly basis to youth who need support. CCADM's Education Specialist also provides financial literacy and employment readiness training.
- Designate this position as the primary point of contact for partner organizations. Having a single point of contact helps maintain a supportive relationship with partners and ensures they know who to contact if they need to address concerns or arrange services for URM youth. (Note: The Education Specialist also serves as the internal point of contact to ensure open lines of communication and information sharing among all CCADM staff members serving URM youth.)
- Educate partners about the specific challenges refugee youth face and encourage partners to provide accommodations. For instance, the Education Specialist works closely with high school staff to determine correct grade-level placement. The Education Specialist also works directly with college admissions staff to enroll URM youth who missed enrollment deadlines or withdrew from classes.



Preliminary Results

CCADM provided preliminary output data used to inform changes to and measure the effectiveness of this practice. Specific examples include:

- The number of URM youth graduating from high school or equivalency programs has increased.
- URM youth are increasingly meeting the requirements to extend foster care. Of the youth who extend foster care, the majority are graduating.



Inputs/Resources

Agencies should expect to invest some funding and time to implement this practice. Below are key inputs and resources needed to adopt this practice.

- Staff member with appropriate skills and expertise to oversee and manage this practice.
- Partnerships with community organizations, schools, employers, and other providers needed to support URM youth.
- Access to student data and information.
- Relationships with school and employer staff members.



Contextual Considerations

Agencies should consider the following contextual factors that may impact implementing this practice.

Finding a staff member with the requisite combination of skills and experience may take time. CCADM's Education Specialist was a teacher and therefore, understands the state education system. He also has prior experience working in resettlement and with at-risk youth. Additionally, he is bilingual and bicultural, and over his years working at CCADM, he has developed unique knowledge of and connections to community resources and supports for URM youth.

It is important that the Education Specialist's caseload allows for the provision of consistently high levels of care and individualized support.

What is a Promising Practice? A promising practice is a unique and/or innovative approach, method, or technique that has demonstrated effectiveness and is replicable. ORR's Refugee Program primarily identifies potential promising practices during recipient and subrecipient monitoring and engages in a validation process to ensure the practice meets the standards to classify it as "promising." Each practice falls under one of the following domains: Physical and Behavioral Health, Employment and Economic Stability, Education and English Language, or Social Adjustment and Integration.